

VJP National Stigma Resource Modules # 4-6

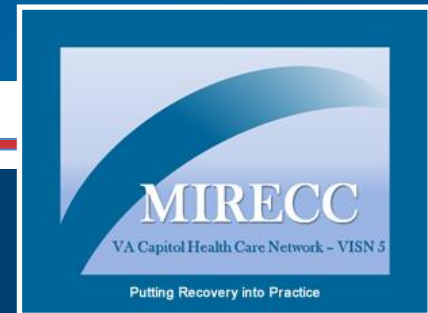
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Materials provided to VJP Specialists for widespread use 2023

VA



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INTRODUCTION

This series of brief modules presents a sequence of ideas and resources to help understand and reduce the stigma faced by justice-involved Veterans, people who work with them, and others experiencing bias and discrimination.

They are designed to...

- Be delivered singly or in combinations
- Be relevant to a wide variety of audiences
- Be customized by each presenter, such as with local examples
- Take about 20 minutes each to deliver, depending on discussion

Questions or Comments?
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Many thanks to the VJP Specialists, Veterans, Peer Specialists, and Subject Matter Experts who contributed to the content of these modules.

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Talking with Justice-involved Veterans about Anticipated & Internalized Stigma



Stigmatization by society about one's problems adds burden to the weight people carry.

Anticipated and Self Stigma are effects of Public Stigma and add yet more.

So, it can be useful to know something about both in working with justice-involved and other Veterans.

Anticipated Stigma

= expecting to be stigmatized

a realistic
expectation at
times,

leading to self-
protective behaviors

but inhibiting & isolating
when globally generalized or met
with insufficient coping resources



Anticipated Stigma

shows up mainly through AVOIDANCE

No shows.... Being sullen or silent....
Declining / refusing things in their best interest

is fueled by worry and anxiety

Of ridicule... Of harm.... Of danger....
Of rejection... Of loss of face... Of embarrassment...

relies on a foundation of all or nothing thinking

X is the past = always X in the future
Those three were X, so all of them will be X
I can never.... They will always..... No one ever...

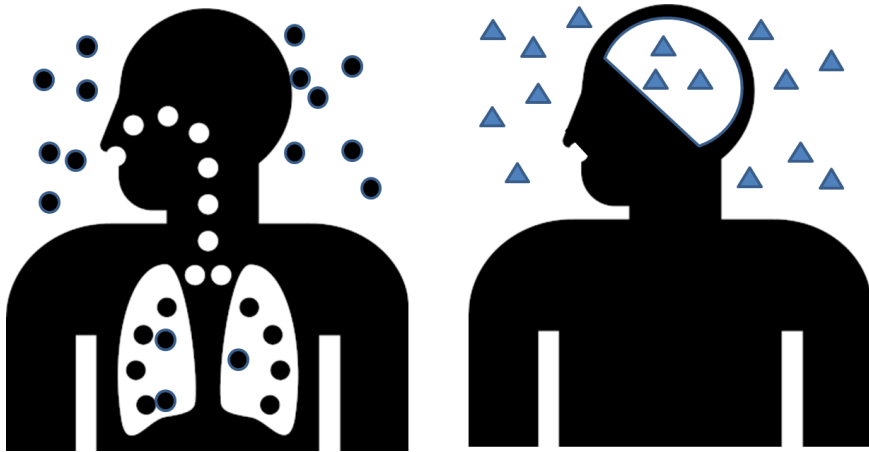
Tips for Addressing Anticipated Stigma

1. Don't try to talk Veterans out of perceptions of past discrimination or disrespect.
2. Encourage avoiding all-or-nothing assumptions
3. Appeal to the opportunity uncertainty gives and the harm of denying oneself the option
4. Acknowledge worry and anxieties; provide encouragement and respect
5. Question the wisdom of pre-judging



Internalized Stigma

= When a person comes to **believe that negative stereotypes about a certain group are true of themselves.**



Another type of harm caused by experiencing stigmatization from others.



Internalized Stigma

STIGMA MESSAGES

“Once a criminal always a criminal”

“I don’t know why we waste resources on felons”

“As a Veteran you should have known better; you should be ashamed”



INTERNALIZED

“Yeah, maybe that’s all I can ever be. Why try.”

“They’re right, I’m pretty worthless and don’t deserve help”

“I’m a loser not a real Veteran; I should just disappear”

Effects of Internalized Stigma

SELF

Corrosive to self
regard, self concept

Creates shame and
self blame

Erodes self trust,
self-efficacy

Obstacle to
empowerment

EMOTIONS

Sadness
Demoralization
Hopelessness

Anger
Frustration
Fear

Worthlessness
Alienation
Wariness

ACTIONS

Why Try Effect
Avoidance
Isolation / Withdrawal

Impedes joining with
helps & supports, self-
help, treatment,
friends & family, etc

Impediment to
working toward goals

...on **top** of the similar effects that societal stigma causes

Tips for Addressing Internalized Stigma

1. Name internalized stigma as a danger to be aware of.
2. Ensure that program/staff language, assumptions, etc don't reinforce stigmatizing messages.
3. Encourage Veterans to see themselves as multi-faceted, not defined by a problem, crime, or life situation.
4. Ensure that staff and Veterans have accurate information so they can separate myth from fact.
5. Notice Veterans' strengths and ask about other aspects of their lives, values, strengths, interests.

Module 4 Additional Resources

The EASE workshop for staff:

Education, Awareness, Shifting Perspective, & Empowerment,

<https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5/training/ease.asp>

The Ending Self Stigma Manual:

Exercises for reducing internalized stigma re mental health (but can be adapted for other sources of stigmatization)

<https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5/training/ess/ESS.asp>

VISN-5 MIRECC Anti-Stigma Resources re Justice-Involved Veterans

<https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5/education/VJP.asp> Justice-Involved Veterans

Veterans Justice Outreach Programs, national webpage

<https://www.va.gov/homeless/vjo.asp>



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The Hazards of Over-Documentation for the Healthcare of Justice-Involved Veterans



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Documentation is Essential

1. Documentation is essential for good care in VHA
 - For coordinating and continuity of care
 - For accurate assessment and treatment
 - For billing and administrative processes
 - CPRS, Cerner, Referrals, etc.
2. What is documented must always balance these needs with Veteran privacy.
3. It is important to include only clinically relevant information and to avoid wording and details likely to spark bias without readers awareness.

The Potential to Spark Prejudice

1. Justice-involvement is commonly associated with many false, negative stereotypes, shaped by details.
2. Such prejudice can be activated in one's thinking even without conscious awareness.
4. Leading to potential biases in care, diminished trust, and poorer outcomes.

THEREFORE:

“VA’s Office of General Counsel has offered the opinion that a Veteran’s legal history and charges should not be documented in detail in the medical record unless they have direct bearing on clinical treatment.” --- VHA Directive 1162.06

Provider A. reads documentation of a Veteran as “a recidivist felon with no remorse.”



Sparking negative associations, distaste, and worry.



Provider A. is a bit on guard meeting the Veteran; develops less rapport than usual.



The Veteran experiences Provider A. as distant or uninterested; may be wary about being judged.



Provider A. may perceive the Veteran’s behavior, words, coping, etc. thru the negative associations.

This combination shapes the information shared, assessments, diagnoses, treatment decisions, AND Veteran engagement & trust in care

An example

Programmatic

How can we approach overdocumentation pressures and associated stereotypes in *whole programs* – housing, vocational, mental health, primary care, or others

- Program are made of people; work with allies, work around (or bring around) obstacle
- Build relationships and understanding outside of individual referrals in low stress ways
- Schedule time with a program or key personnel to discuss mutual resources or issues
- Education – about your work, VJP, dismantling stereotypes – with individuals & groups

How does / can the national VJP Office help?

- Always available to you for consultation, strategizing, back-up, and office hours
- VJP and national colleagues (eg. GPD, MHR RTP) frequently present together on many platforms to advocate for decreased stigmatization of justice-involved Veterans.
- Recordings or slides from such National VJP presentations are available to use locally
- VJP VACO team also creates / joins efforts to address specific systemic problems, such as national workgroup regarding Veterans convicted of sexual crimes.

Tips for Avoiding “Overdocumentation”

1. Chose wording and details carefully to avoid sparking prejudiced associations.

“completed the Veteran Court plan” rather than “evaded prison”

2. Use person first language

“A Veteran with substance use disorder” rather than “an addict”

3. Discuss sensitive details by phone or in person

→ CPRS is not a communication channel

4. Consult with local VJP Specialists

They often have useful insight into the intersection of a Veteran’s clinical and legal history

Module 5 Additional Resources

Documentation Awareness

https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5/education/VJP/Over_Documentation_Resource.pdf

Research Article:

Redmond et al. (2020). Perceived Discrimination Based on Criminal Record in Healthcare Settings and Self-Reported Health Status among Formerly Incarcerated Individuals, Journal of Urban Health, Vol 97, 105–111.

Full text here: <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s11524-019-00382-0.pdf>

VISN-5 MIRECC Anti-Stigma Resources re Justice-Involved Veterans

[https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5/education/VJP.aspstice-Involved Veterans](https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5/education/VJP.aspstice-Involved_Veterans)

Veterans Justice Outreach Programs, national webpage

<https://www.va.gov/homeless/vjo.asp>



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Everyday Strategies & Micro-Interventions to Reduce Stigmatization of Justice-Involved Veterans

Stigmatization is a **Social** Problem

- = The devaluing of a group of people as “other” and “less than.”**
- = a process we DO to each other**

THEREFORE:

There are things each of us can do to help erode it and lessen the harm it causes for justice-involved Veterans, people with other stigmatized identities, and everyone working to assist Veterans and others.

Everyday Ideas

Changing stigmatization can happen small ways

1. Looking at our thinking, notes, documentation to see if the wording, tone, or implicit assumptions can be improved.
2. Looking at our unit's approach and materials for the same.
3. Observing when/where stigmatizing things happen and strategizing with others to change the flow somehow.
4. Helping each other challenge cynicism about Veteran outcomes with positive examples, stories, resources.

What other things do you already do?

Everyday Ideas: Examples of #1 & #2

1&2. Considering our own or unit's notes, thinking, materials

- Person first, respectful language?
- How do we deal with all the negative stereotypes about justice-involved Veterans that we and they are exposed to?
- Do we view Veterans as full people with potential and strengths?
- Do we focus on problems; not view the person as the problem?
- How do we describe our purpose, focus, responsibilities? Any cynical gap between that and what we say informally?
- Do we have ways to deal with frustration? Burn out?

Everyday Ideas: Examples of #3

3. Where / When do you observe stigmatizing things happen? What small opportunities do you have to shift one of them?

- Inviting a stigmatizing person you must deal with out for coffee? (humanizing each other, understanding them better might help)
- Asking some questions, before protesting or requesting change, to help you hone your request.
- Telling a Veteran what you observe works best with that judge, or in that intake to avoid stigmatization, while acknowledging it as unfair.
- What do you find works, for what kind of stigma situation?

Everyday Ideas: Examples of #4

4. Helping each other challenge cynicism about Veteran outcomes with positive examples, stories, resources.

- Make a point of sharing good stories and victories large and small
- Work with and back up (but don't tokenize) Peer Support Specialists
- Recognize people & programs helping justice-involved Veterans
- Bring successful justice-involved Veterans come back to give your team, court, program, current Veterans a lift, a positive example.
- For several additional ideas see :
https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5/education/VJP/Positive_Representation_Sources.pdf

Micro-Interventions in the Moment

Another effective strategy is interrupting stigma in the moment. There are many options that are not confrontational or involved.

1. Pointed silence

Not laughing

Turn away without comment

Raised eyebrow; The Look

Wow, just wow.

2. Quick Signal

Ouch.

Did you really just say... ?

Why do we do it that way?

3. Ask a Question

What did you just say? (then leave silence)

Could you please repeat that? (then wait)

Thanks to the work of Dr. Derald Wing Sue (see resources)

Micro-Interventions in the Moment

You may find different options fit different settings, situations, or people. Or you may just gravitate towards certain ones.

4. Note but don't engage

That is offensive

That's not how we refer to Veterans here

That is a myth, an inaccurate stereotype

5. Offer to talk more later, IF you want to

Would you be interested in talking about that sometime?

We have different experiences of that, perhaps we could discuss it.

Thanks to the work of Dr. Derald Wing Sue (see resources)

Module 6 Additional Resources

Veterans Administration Bystander Activation Training & Resources

<https://www.veterantraining.va.gov/bystandertraining/>

Resources from the work of Dr. Derald Wing Sue & Colleagues

<https://www.everydayhealth.com/emotional-health/microaggressions-what-they-are-and-why-they-can-have-macro-effects/>

https://priceschool.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/microintervention.toolkit.brochure_part_1.pdf

<https://www.tc.columbia.edu/articles/2021/march/derald-wing-sue-offers-strategies-to-disarm-and-dismantle-racism-and-bias/>

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